Accessibility INSIDER
A Comprehensive Guide to Accessing Your Education
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What is Accessibility?

Introduction

Congratulations – you are thinking of going to college! Whichever college or university you decide to attend, you are going to a campus that is unique and has created its own culture and atmosphere. All schools have something in common: they cannot discriminate against anyone due to a disability! U.S. schools are responsible for making their courses, campuses, activities and services accessible to people with disabilities. Whether you have had a disability diagnosis for a long time or have been recently diagnosed, it is important to understand the system of laws and policies related to your new experience with post-secondary education and how you can, and should, maximize your time there!

This guide will largely focus on students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or 5-4 Plan at the time of graduation or leaving high school.
What is a College Accessibility Office?
Publicly funded colleges and universities have professional staff to coordinate and approve accommodations and services to students with disabilities. This office will have different names at different schools, including Campus Accessibility or Disability Services. The word “accessibility” rather than disability reflects an emphasis on the environment to adapt rather than the individual. You can find the name used by each school on their webpage by searching the term “disability” or “accommodation.”

Who Benefits from Accessibility Services?
Anytime a student has a concern about accessing a classroom or other physical space on campus or is concerned they may not fully access the material or information presented in a class, they should discuss this with the school, specifically the Accessibility Office. If you have a diagnosed disability currently impacting a life function, or have had an IEP or 504 in high school, you have a right to access the physical environment as well as all educational offerings.
Types of Disabilities

Disability is defined as any physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities such as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, or working. "Disabilities" can include impairments that fall into the following categories:

- Cognitive/Learning
- Medical
- Psychological
- Communication
- Physical/Mobility
- Visual/Hearing
Rights/Laws (IDEA vs ADA)

In public K-12 schools, educational rights are protected by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This law makes a free, appropriate public education available to eligible children. The IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services. Children and youth ages 3 through 21 receive special education and related services under IDEA, Part B.

Students with disabilities in post-secondary education are protected from discrimination through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This is very different from the IDEA. Colleges are required to follow regulations laid out in Section 504 and the ADA. These prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability, and cover qualified students with disabilities who attend schools receiving Federal financial assistance. It defines the rights of individuals with disabilities to participate in, and have access to, program benefits and services.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>PUBLIC SCHOOLS, GRADES K-12</th>
<th>QUALIFYING POST-SECONDARY SCHOOLS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who is affected?</td>
<td>Children with disabilities, until they graduate from high school or age out.</td>
<td>Anyone with a disability, as long as they are “otherwise qualified” to attend school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What rights are guaranteed?</td>
<td>Access to free, appropriate public education.</td>
<td>Protection from discrimination because of a disability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is a disability assessed?</td>
<td>School is responsible for identification and evaluation of any disabilities.</td>
<td>Student must provide proof/documents about disability, per school’s requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do accommodations get assigned?</td>
<td>School develops IEP, indicating accommodations and modifications (if any).</td>
<td>Student must request “reasonable accommodations” and school must ensure equal access to education for the student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What about specialized equipment and services?</td>
<td>School distributes necessary devices and aids.</td>
<td>Students secure their own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are parents/guardians involved in any way?</td>
<td>Yes, parents/guardians are actively involved up to age 18.</td>
<td>If student is over 18, they are adults and make their own decisions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Persons are not entitled to protection of the ADA simply because they have been diagnosed with a disability. The disability must substantially limit their ability to perform one or more major life activity.

At the post-secondary level, the school is required to provide students with reasonable/appropriate academic adjustments and aids/services removing barriers to learning, but these cannot result in a fundamental alteration of a recipient’s program or impose an undue burden. The law requires students be provided with effective accommodations, not the best or most expensive accommodations.
Transition Planning

Transition planning means evaluating needs, strengths, and skills required for a student to move from high school to postsecondary life. Prior to graduating high school is when transition planning is critical. High school students receiving special education services must begin planning by the age of 16 (In New Hampshire this process begins at age 14).

IDEA (34 CFR§300) regulations provide language specifically referring to transition. A thorough transition plan should include, among other things:

- **Student Participation**: The student is expected to participate in the meetings, so they can voice their individual needs and wants
- **Post-Secondary Goals**: These are not just related to learning, but should cover living arrangements, life skills, transportation, etc
- **Transfer of Rights/Age of Majority**: When a student is 18, all rights and decisions, as well as responsibilities related to transition plans, are solely made by the student, unless circumstances dictate another course of decision making
- **Summary of Performance**: This replaces an IEP, and should include post-secondary goals for the student as well as functional and academic performance measurements
Questions to Ask a College Before Applying

You will be making a big decision when you decide to apply to college. Asking specific accessibility related questions will give you a better understanding of the college’s approach to students with accessibility needs. Each school is going to address your disability uniquely and provide the most reasonable approach for your situation, to maximize your access. Here is a list of possible questions to ask during an inquiry meeting:

- **Proof**: What types of documentation are needed to be considered for accommodations?

- **Housing**: How might a physical or mobility impairment or mental health condition impact on-campus housing options?

- **Course Load and Graduation Time**: Is priority registration available for students with disabilities?

- **Student Groups**: Are there specific groups designed to assist students with disabilities to network with other students on campus? Are there student leadership/mentoring programs to help students feel connected with other students on campus?

- **Supports Services**: What support services are available to students? Does the campus have support services specifically for students with my disability?

- **Orientation**: Prior to enrollment, can I meet with college staff who specialize in working with students with disabilities? When do students seeking accommodations typically begin the process?
Applying to College

When deciding which college(s) to apply to, keep in mind you will be evaluated just like any other applicant as to whether you meet admission requirements. Admission requirements reflect the academic rigor of the college. Your transcript, GPA, class ranking, essay, and other required materials are going to be reviewed by the admissions staff. Whether to disclose a disability at this time is a personal decision. Colleges are prohibited from asking a student about a disability and may not deny admission solely because of a disability. Likewise, colleges are not required to waive or lower their admission criteria if a student discloses.

A student might want to disclose early on if they feel this information will help explain a period of poor academic performance or if the student wants to highlight how they have learned to adapt and make adjustments to how they approach learning.

Setting Up Accommodations in College = Disclosure

Students seeking accommodations in college must disclose a disability and be ready to provide documentation. Students are generally responsible for initiating the accommodation request process. A qualified staff member reviews the documentation, determines if the information confirms a disability, consults with the student and makes a determination about reasonable accommodations. The process is interactive and decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.

NOTE: Accommodations from high school may not apply in college.

There may be more than one way to accommodate a student’s needs. Consideration will be given to the student’s preference, however, the college reserves the right to offer a student an equally effective accommodation.

This process is private. The only information shared with instructors is the accommodations for which a student is approved and details of any processes related to those accommodations. The details of a documented disability are not shared with anyone unless the student chooses to share.
Examples of Accommodations

The following are examples of college level academic accommodations:

• Sign language interpreters
• Copies of class notes
• Audio recording of class lectures
• Test taking accommodations, such as extended time, a reduced distraction environment, repeating instructions
• Altering spaces, via typical building ADA compliance, like adjustable desks, etc.
• Written materials in alternative formats such as large print, Braille, computer diskette, or audiotape readers
• Ability to take breaks during class

Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy is recognized as the ability to speak and act on behalf of one’s self.

Self-understanding is the beginning of this process and results in an individual knowing their diagnosis, and more importantly, what the implications are for education and career choices. This includes an understanding of one’s strengths and areas of challenge, knowledge of accommodations that may be needed, and a willingness to reach out if your accommodations are not being met or need to be reevaluated.

In college, there are no case managers to oversee accommodations and check on student progress. Instead, college students are responsible for initiating assistance. Students do not need to share any diagnostic information to their instructors but are encouraged to ask questions and advocate for themselves when additional help is needed.
Temporary Disabilities

Impairments such as broken bones, temporary illness, recovery from surgery and some mental/psychological conditions are recognized by colleges as temporary conditions and might negatively impact a student’s academic progress. Students should contact the accessibility office on campus to have a discussion about what the school can provide for temporary accommodations. The office may request documentation for any disability – even temporary – including a diagnosis, prognosis, expected duration, and current functional limitations/impact.

Examples of academic accommodations during a temporary condition include:

• Assistance with taking class notes
• Scheduling missed tests
• Possible extended exam time should the student need a reader, scribe, or assistive technology
• Possible alternative test environment, i.e. a reduced distraction, sensory adjusted environment
• Assistive technology or personal help – for reading, writing, or recording class lectures
• Verification of a disability to faculty members re: making up work/exams
  • Students need to communicate with each instructor to determine if late work can be submitted for grading and to inquire about additional support in a class
• Preferential parking – those in need of temporary parking arrangements can communicate with the accessibility office and/or campus public safety to determine a temporary solution
Living independently at college can be overwhelming at first. Most colleges offer services to help with a variety of challenges - outside of accessibility services! Here are some examples of assistance, available to everyone:

- **Academic Resource Center**: Offers academic coaching, professional and peer tutoring, academic reading strategies, organization and time management skills, general study strategies and study habits for specific classes.

- **Residential Services**: Assists with situations related to your housing and roommates

- **Campus Dining Services**: Students with food allergies and sensitivities can speak with designated dining staff to learn more about options meeting their particular needs

- **Counseling**: Provides short-term assistance with stress management, home-sickness, anxiety, and other mental health needs

- **Health Centers**: Offer care if you get ill, have an injury, or need basic medications or referrals to area healthcare providers for more serious conditions

- **Religious Centers**: Offer gatherings for different denominations represented on campus

- **Financial Aid and Business Offices**: Assist with school tuition/billing inquiries, financial aid questions, scholarship information, and post-college loan repayment information

- **Information Technology Support**: Supports supplied technology like dorm internet service and computer labs, and answers general technology-related questions

- **Career Centers**: Help students explore potential majors, careers, internships, and post-graduation employment as well as resume writing, interview practice, and evaluating job offers
Resources

Parent Information Center (PIC)
NH Based Parent/Family Assistance Center – providing comprehensive information for families of students with disabilities.
http://www.picnh.org

The US. Department of Education (USDOE)
This Department is dedicated to helping students and their families understand the changes students with disabilities will face going from high school to college or to other post-secondary training.
https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html
https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transitionguide.html

Vocational Rehabilitation (NHVR)
Vocational Rehabilitation is a division of the Department of Education that assists persons with disabilities to help themselves to get a job, keep the job, and develop a life time career. This can include training and education.
https://www.education.nh.gov/vr

Mobility International USA
Mobility International USA (MIUSA) is a disability-led non-profit organization advancing disability rights and leadership globally.
Their mission is to empower people with disabilities around the world to achieve their human rights through international exchange and international development.

https://www.miusa.org/resource/tipsheet/collegeaccessibility
https://www.miusa.org/resource/tipsheet/campusresources

**Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)**
AHEAD: develops, shares, and provides relevant knowledge; strategically engages in actions that enhance higher educational professionals’ effectiveness; and advocates on behalf of its membership, their institutions, their work, and those they serve ensuring full, effective participation by individuals with disabilities in every aspect of the postsecondary experience. AHEAD envisions a postsecondary experience that embraces disability and is free from barriers.

https://www.ahead.org/home

**Additional Reference Materials:**
https://www.understood.org/articles/en/7-things-to-know-about-college-disability-services
https://www.transitionresourceguide.ca/resources/accessibility-services
# How We Can Help

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<th>Timeline:</th>
<th>Our Free Services:</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Freshman through Senior Year</strong></td>
<td><strong>Education, College, Financial Aid, and Career Planning Presentations</strong></td>
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<td>FREE presentations for students and at schools, community organizations, and statewide. In-person and virtual events available.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Check with your school counseling office or nhheaf.org for our calendar of events.</td>
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<td><strong>Spring of Junior Year</strong></td>
<td><strong>Destination College℠</strong></td>
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<td>FREE day of college planning workshops and college fair – for current high school juniors and families</td>
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<td>destinationcollege.org</td>
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<td><strong>Spring of Junior Year through Fall of Senior Year</strong></td>
<td><strong>Exploring Options Appointment</strong></td>
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<td>Appointment with student and family to discuss planning for after high school and answer any questions you have at this point</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Summer Before Senior Year</strong></td>
<td><strong>Summer College Prep Classes</strong></td>
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<td>Workshops for rising high school seniors focused on helping them write the college essay or start their Common Application</td>
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<td><strong>Fall of Senior Year</strong></td>
<td><strong>Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Filing Appointment</strong></td>
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<td>Appointment to help file this important federal financial aid form any time after October 1st of the year you need to file</td>
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<td><strong>Winter and Spring of Senior Year</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reviewing Offer Letters Appointment</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Appointment to review financial aid offer letter and discuss options to pay for college any time after a student receives their financial aid offer</td>
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For all appointment booking, go to [calendly.com/nhheaf_ccp](http://calendly.com/nhheaf_ccp).